

Cal Fire implements burn restrictions

Sierra Star, Thursday, May 9, 2013

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit (MMU) has transitioned into fire season preparedness levels with increased staffing at all Cal Fire stations as of Saturday May 4. Due to the lack of rainfall and higher than normal temperatures this past spring, fire danger is above average across the Central Sierra. California lends itself to severe wildfire conditions year round with its unique climate and topography, but this year we are experiencing historic low fuel moistures, and have moved into peak fire season condition earlier than predicted. The chance of large and damaging fires exists throughout California.

MMU is reminding all residents that live in the State Responsibility Area (SRA) that MMU will restrict daytime burning as the fuel conditions continue to dry and increase the chance of a wildland fire to actively spread. Burn restrictions in Eastern Madera and Mariposa Counties will be regulated by elevation. Grass lands in the lower elevations of Eastern Madera, Mariposa and Merced Counties are very dry. Therefore, hazard reduction may be restricted earlier for lower elevations.

Information regarding these restrictions for Madera and Merced Counties will be indicated on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District burn day phone line at 1-877-429-2876 and on the Mariposa County Burn Day Information line at (209) 966-1200.

Permit holders must follow all restrictions listed on their permits which include but are not limited to, calling the burn day information line to determine if it is a permissive burn day prior to the ignition of vegetation.

When burning do so carefully, always remain in attendance, have access to water, and never burn on days that have windy conditions. By following a few simple steps to create and maintain your defensible space homeowners can drastically increase the survivability of their home during a wildfire.

Madera County, Fresno reach settlement on Tesoro Viejo development

By Kurtis Alexander, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, May 9, 2013

The city of Fresno has agreed to drop its lawsuit over a proposed mega-development along Highway 41 in Madera County, signaling at least a partial reprieve in the growth wars that have engulfed the region.

In a settlement reached this week between Fresno and Madera County, the developer of the 5,200-home Tesoro Viejo community can move forward without legal threat, but will pay the city a nominal fee for every house that's built.

City officials have fought this project, and others near its borders, because of the costs associated with new development -- from traffic to air pollution to added burdens on city services.

Recently, Fresno has made efforts to halt suburban development and steer building into its blighted downtown.

While City Manager Mark Scott acknowledged that the agreed-upon \$1,600-per-home impact fee at Tesoro Viejo does little to confront sprawl, he said the legal settlement allows the city and county to put the lawsuit to rest and begin discussing a broader plan for regional growth.

"We didn't enter this agreement thrilled with Tesoro Viejo," Scott said.

The agreement calls for the city and Madera County to convene discussions, moderated by state officials, about where future development should go and how its costs will be paid for.

Madera County, as well as Fresno County, are planning for construction of tens of thousands of new homes just north of the city along the San Joaquin River. More than 100,000 people could one day be living in the area.

Tesoro Viejo, proposed by McCaffrey Homes, is among the first slated for Madera County's side of the river.

The residential project near Children's Hospital Central California is expected to include 3 million square feet of retail, office and commercial space over 1,600 acres. It also calls for 15 miles of walking and biking trails and 400 acres of open space.

"We are pleased that the city's lawsuit has been resolved, and we are now focused on moving forward with this very exciting community," said developer Brent McCaffrey in a statement emailed to The Bee.

Madera County and McCaffrey settled a separate lawsuit this week with the state Department of Transportation. Caltrans had sued over the project, alleging that forecasts of traffic had been understated. The parties agreed to do more traffic studies.

Widening of Highway 41 is expected to result, though when and where remains to be determined.

The project still faces two lawsuits from environmental groups. One takes issue with air pollution from the new community and the other with the project's claim to river water.

Madera County and Fresno also remain in litigation over the proposed Marketplace at El Paseo, a project along Highway 99 in Fresno that's been compared to River Park.

Madera County sued the city over El Paseo, alleging it would cause many of the same problems that the city feared with Tesoro Viejo. This week's settlement at Tesoro Viejo did not address El Paseo.

The settlement leaves the parties a long way from settling their differences over growth.

Any compromise will have to take up such prickly issues as how tax revenues from new big-box stores will be shared, how much developers should pay in impact fees and whether the city deserves money to pay for blight left behind with suburbanization.

Then, there's their competing philosophies of whether development should take place in the inner city or on the fringe.

The settlement calls for planners from the Governor's Office to help reconcile these differences of opinion.

In the past, Madera County had not welcomed guidance from the state, fearing the planners would side with the city and support plans for infill.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, May 9, 2013:](#)

Celebrate air-quality advances, but don't think the work is over

by Mark Grossi

This message has played for years: San Joaquin Valley air quality has come a long way, and we need to celebrate progress. But we've still got years of work ahead to achieve all federal standards.

You'll recognize the theme in the latest annual report from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which turned 20 years old last year.

The report says winters and summers are the cleanest they've ever been here. The Valley has achieved the coarse particle pollution standard — it's called PM-10, or dust.

But tighter federal ozone and particle pollution standards will come. The Valley probably will still be struggling in the next two decades. The 4 million people here live in a bowl of air that traps pollutants.

The difference now is that there has been a shift in public awareness. I wrote my first news story on the air district in June 1993, and it illustrated the thinking of the time.

The story was titled "Wood-burning rules go on back burner." People refused fireplace rules. Instead, the district began discussing "voluntary wood-burning rules."

"The two words (voluntary and rules) go together as much as jumbo and shrimp, and army and intelligence," said Charles Harness, a board member at the time. The words confusing and toothless also were used.

A dozen years later, people still didn't want a wood-burning rule, but the district became one of the first places in the country to enforce bans on burning.

The change was forced by air-quality activists and advocates who filed a federal lawsuit. This kind of legal action has been a driving force behind many important changes in Valley air quality.

Today, the fireplace soot problem remains, but Valley winters are nothing like they were in the 1990s.

More importantly, people seem to have come around. The air district now is tightening the wood-burning rule, and many readers have told me that it's good news.

The wood-burning rule is just one among many important changes over the last 20 years. The air district also has regulated air pollution from farms as well as city sprawl. Air leaders also pioneered an alert system online and via texting to tell the public when pollution is spiking.

All of which is important to recognize with fanfare. After the celebration, though, there's more work and expense waiting.